

RUBA'IYAT
OF
OMAR KHAYYAM
A NEW METRICAL VERSION RENDERED
INTO ENGLISH FROM VARIOUS
PERSIAN SOURCES
BY
GEORGE ROE

WITH AN INTRODUCTION AND MANY NOTES AND
REFERENCES, AND AN ORIGINAL
" ODE TO OMAR "

FRONTISPIECE BY
ADELAIDE HANSCOM LEESON

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To
MY FELLOW MEMBERS
OF
THE OMAR KHAYYAM CLUB OF AMERICA

AND ESPECIALLY TO
MR. NATHAN HASKELL DOLE
MR. CHARLES D. BURRAGE
AND
MR. EBEN F. THOMPSON

THIS VOLUME IS DEDICATED AS A TOKEN OF GRATITUDE
FOR THE KINDNESS AND ENCOURAGEMENT
I HAVE RECEIVED AT THEIR HANDS

Preface to this edition

Omar Khayyam, a true polymath and one of the most celebrated icons of Persian culture, lived, according to the best scholastic estimate, from 1048 to 1131 of the Western Era. His many avocations included the composition of poetry, and about 1200 rubai or quatrains have been attributed to him. Of these about 500 are considered definitely to be the work of the master.

The rubai of Omar Khayyam became popular in the West largely through the efforts of Edward Fitzgerald, who published his first collection of quatrains translated into English, 75 in number, in 1859. Fitzgerald's version was neither the most comprehensive or accurate rendering of Omar's work, but due to the translator's own poetic genius and his imposition of a narrative on the collection, it has remained the most popular presentation of the Persian poet's oeuvre.

However, there have been many other English translations of great merit, but few have followed Fitzgerald's example in building a narrative stream into the translation. An interesting exception is the translation by the American George Roe, which was published in New York in 1910. Roe's version contains a substantial introduction and also a preface "Ode to Omar", which consists of 20 quatrains, which capture the style if not the grandeur of the master's work.

The implied narrative in Omar's work is one relating to spiritual development rather than historical adventure. Possibly the most powerful poetic description of such a spiritual pilgrimage occurs at the end of T.S.Eliot's *Little Gidding*:

We shall not cease from exploration

And the end of all our exploring

Will be to arrive where we started

And know the place for the first time.

Eliot then suggests that the state of spiritual enlightenment is:

A condition of complete simplicity

(Costing not less than everything)

James Allen, more a philosopher than a poet, has described the enlightened state in the *Divine Companion*, as follows:

Arisen, awakened, healed, and made perfect;

He has unveiled the Face of the Highest;

He knows the Great Rest,

The Deep Silence,

The Profound Peace.

In the Light which knows no darkness he walks,

And it casts no shadow on his pathway.

In contrast, Omar's presentation of the spiritual struggle and its resolution is at once more homely and more apocalyptic. His seeker oscillates between absorption in the pleasures of the present moment and speculation of the impenetrable abyss in which the brief sojourn of human life appears to be suspended. The end of the story is not the transfiguration but the radical disappearance of the drinker/thinker. The numinous is concealed within a huge cloud of doubt: the glowing certitude of faith in things unseen, which is the foundation of all religious belief, is totally lacking, and the nature of existence outside the narrow confines of human life is shrouded in mystery.

In today's world, Omar's vision is familiar, but uncomfortable, challenging but difficult to refute. In this edition the body of the poem has been divided, somewhat arbitrarily, into eleven sections, suggestive of the stages through which a spiritual aspirant might pass. Roe's version ends rather abruptly with his presentation of the conversation among the pots, which is also magically described by Fitzgerald. For Roe, the disappearance of the drinker/thinker into eternal nothingness is the matter of an instant, for he eschews the gentle and nostalgic coda that Fitzgerald appended to each of his versions.

This edition does not include Roe's footnotes, which would be of interest to the scholar, but which are not necessary for the reader to enjoy this elegant and thoughtful selection of Omar's work.

Denis Daly
Perth, Western Australia
June 2013

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Introduction by translator

INTRODUCTION

BETWEEN those English versions of Omar which sacrifice the letter to the requirements of good verse and those which, in order to be literal, sacrifice the spirit to the letter, there is a great gulf. I have attempted a middle course, and the following stanzas are the result.

In striving to accomplish two objects, it has sometimes been necessary to disregard the one in order to attain the other, and hence, while my desire to be literal may have often marred my verses, my desire to write a readable poem, with a connection between the stanzas that does not exist in the diwan form, may have tempted me to depart too readily from the letter.

Whatever may be the faults or merits of the translation, however, I believe that the marginal references cannot fail to prove valuable to Omarian students. Upon the left-hand margin is given the number of each quatrain in the leading English, German, French, and Italian translations, while the references upon the right-hand margin indicate some of the MSS. and reproductions where the Persian text of the stanza may be found.

With the exception of Mr. FitzGerald's masterpiece, the English metrical versions selected for comparison have been chosen not so much for their merits as poetical compositions as because they are *bona fide* translations.

Of the numerous imitations of Mr. FitzGerald's poem, some are written with great smoothness, but even in the best that have come to my notice the epigrammatic terseness of Omar is beaten out into such a long string of musical, but thin and weak stanzas, that it seems scarcely fair to hang them upon the heavy-laden peg of the old tent-maker's reputation.

The compounding of two or more quatrains into one, or the expanding of a single quatrain into many, can be successful only in the hands of genius; I have, therefore, avoided such an attempt, and each of my stanzas, however imperfect, is the representative of an individual ruba'i. Unlike other translators who have followed this method, I have, however, attempted to weave the separate quatrains into a full poem whose form bears no resemblance to the disjointed arrangement of the original MSS.

The metre which I have adopted is the Iambic Pentameter, but I have occasionally substituted a Trochee for the initial iambus, and in one line it has seemed desirable to drop entirely the final iambus. What appears to be the generally accepted English pronunciation of proper names has been used throughout, although such form may offend the ear of a purist. Thus, Kur'án, becomes Kóran; Bahrám, becomes Báhram, etc. Both pronunciations of Bahram are used by Whinfield, and while FitzGerald writes the accent upon the last syllable, it is necessary to change its position in scanning the line.

In selecting the Iambic Pentameter, I have been influenced rather by the usage of other translators than by that of Omar himself, whose various forms of metre generally contain more than ten syllables, and who would, therefore, be better represented by a longer measure, such as the Alexandrine.

Mr. Whinfield suggests, in his scholarly introduction, that the large number of monosyllabic words contained in English counterbalance the brevity of the decasyllabic line, or, in other words, that it is possible to express oneself in fewer syllables when writing English than would be possible if Persian were employed. This would undoubtedly be true of that form of Persian used in India, but, as Mr. Scott Waring pointedly remarks, "The language of the Persians is wonderfully laconic, while that spoken in India is ridiculously verbose; in Persia it is soft and sweet, in India harsh and disagreeable." The very sweetness of the Persian tongue, however, the great number of similar sounds pleasing to the ear, and the ease with which thoughts can be musically expressed, give to Persian poetry an airy lightness that could not be easily reproduced in Alexandrine verses; hence the choice of a shorter and lighter measure is probably well advised, although it will be found that comparatively few of the Iambic Pentameters quoted in the marginal references have been able to bear the full burden of the Persian quatrains which they represent.

My translation follows the original in that the first, second, and fourth lines, and occasionally all four lines, are rhymed, and in that the rhyme-word is sometimes thrown back a few syllables, and followed by what is technically known as the "redif" or *rearword*. This form of throwback and redif often gives the quatrain a quaintly musical sound and is excellently illustrated by Mr. Nathan Haskell Dole in the following stanzas, which he has kindly permitted me to quote from his "Multi-variorum Edition of the Ruba'iyat" : —

*"Sage OMAR! would thou wert alive again !
Then might we surely see thee strive again
To gather from the bitter flowers of Fate
Sweet honey for our human hive again!*

*"The stars still shine as once they brightly shone.
When, as they watched Thy terrace, nightly shone
The answering flashes of thy love and hate,
And red gleams of the wine-cup nightly shone!*

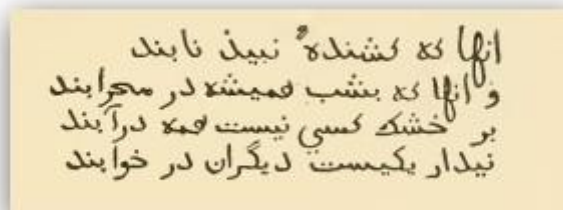
*"The blood-red petals from the roses fall, as then they did,
Death for us moderns closes all, as then it did;
We know not more than thou didst know of life-to-be;
The ruthless Wheel of Heaven disposes all, as then it did.*

*"But thy example makes us brave to face our fate;
There may be love beyond the grave to grace our fate,
And we, meanwhile, will keep alive the glow of life, to be
Worth saving, if great ALLAH deign to save, to grace our fate.*

*"And so accept this volume as a meed of praise,
Altho' thy fame, so stablised, hath no need of praise,
And thou thyself art very far away from us -
So far, thou'dst not take heed of blame or heed of praise.*

*"A score of zealous poets have translated thee
In tongues unheard of when the Mollahs hated thee,
And now accept their tribute, and this lay from us
For whom thy living words have re-created thee!"*

Mr. John Payne, in his translation, published by the Villon Society, has also illustrated the remarkable construction of Omar's verses, but with less success than Mr. Dole. Indeed, while the Villon translation indicates a profound knowledge of Vedantic and Oriental lore, Mr. Payne's stanzas are sometimes but little short of astounding. For example the following ruba'i : —



is thus rendered : —

*"Those who of sheer old wine, unmingled, drinkers deep are,
And those who still a-nights in prayer-niche watch-a-keep are,
Not one is on dry land, i' the water all a-heap are,
But one of them's awake, whilst t'others all asleep are."*

Omar has had many translators, in many tongues, but Mr. Payne's verses are the most remarkable. They are written in rhyme and metre, but they are not poetry; they are marvellously literal, but they fail to convey the spirit; they are written by an evident master of prosody, but they are almost devoid of music; and yet, despite all its shortcomings, his long work of 845 quatrains bears the stamp of learning, experience, and industry.

In striking contrast to this version is the poem of Mr. FitzGerald. Its longest edition contains only 110 quatrains, of which less than half are translations, and the remainder are inspired not only by Khayyam but Hafiz, Jami, Attar, and others. Nevertheless, FitzGerald has, with the magic touch of genius, infused into the few quatrains which he has given us more of the spirit of Omar than all the other English translators combined. Careless of prosody, his work is full of music: an indifferent Persian scholar, he grasps the poet's meaning with marvellous intuition; with a magnificent disdain of the letter, he presents us with the kernel of the thought ; and over the whole he throws the magic mantle of his own personality and talks to us in words that flow from the living depths of a poet's soul. In one point alone is he lacking, and that, indeed, is not by accident but by design, as he admits in a letter to Professor Cowell. The point, as I understand it, refers to the Vedantic doctrine of the ultimate reabsorption of the soul when freed from the world-figment or Maya of individuality, in the Brahman, or Impersonal Self of the Supreme Spirit. It is, however, because he has only lightly touched upon this belief in two quatrains, one of which appears to have been inspired by the Mantik-ul-Tair of Attar, that the chief *raison d'etre* of the following work exists.

Whether the wine and love of which Omar sings are the wine and love of a sensual materialist, or whether they have a spiritual meaning, such as is generally the case in Sufi poetry, is a much debated question. It is highly probable, however, that they sometimes signify one thing, sometimes another, for written as they were at different periods and without reference to each other, the quatrains appear but to reflect the passing mood of the poet; sometimes they overflow with the vivacity of a strong animal vitality; sometimes they are full of thoughtful speculation and wonder ; always, indeed, they are clever and epigrammatic, but often, also, do they tremble with a note of sorrow that verges on the very borderland of despair.

That Omar was, to a considerable extent, impregnated with the doctrines of the Sufis is indicated by many of his quatrains. Indeed it appears that the Aryan instincts of the more intelligent Persians led them to discard the Semitic materialism of Muhammad for a belief more profound and spiritual than anything their Arab conquerors could teach or appreciate. Thus it was that the Sufi doctrine arose, a pure pantheism that regarded God as an eternal spirit, without beginning and without end, - a spirit from which, at the beginning, our souls emanated and to which, in the end, they surely will return.

This doctrine, which was expounded by Plato to the Western world, and by the profoundest of Vedanta philosophers to ancient Hindustan, found a fertile soil among the thinking minds of Persia, who, impelled by their environment to an outward observance of Muhammadanism, nevertheless used it but as a cloak to cover the tenets of a purer and a loftier creed. Thus, while both Sufi and orthodox Muhammadan believed in the immortality of the soul, the former professed a belief in the final reabsorption of the individual spirit in the divine essence, while the latter looked forward to a material paradise where he could drink wine and rejoice himself with black-eyed houris, by the chrystal waters of the River Kusar.

The Moslem, filled with visions of a material heaven, more delightful to him than the prospect of a spiritual reunion with God, boldly faces death in the assurance of sensual pleasures that await him in Paradise; the Sufi, on the other hand, believes even Paradise to be a part of the Maya or illusion that he is seeking to escape, and though he may welcome death as a step toward the boundless sea of divine love for which he longs, oft-times he cannot forbear a sigh of regret for the lovely world he is leaving. The spring breezes, the fragrant flowers, the pleasures of beauty and of love can scarce forsaken without a passing shade of sorrow; but as the bride weeps for the friends she is leaving, yet feels a new joy within her heart, so the Sufi sighs farewell to the pleasures and beauty of the world and turns toward the source of his being in confidence and peace.

"Rejoice in the spring and be glad, for the roses will bloom when you are here no more," sang Hafiz; but he knew that when the roses were blooming over his grave his soul might perchance be reabsorbed in the divine essence, for he has told us that:

"The ocean of divine love is an ocean that hath no shore,
In which we have no remedy but yield up our souls [to God]."

So too, our Omar has told us that the path of love will lead our souls till they are lost in the fountain of life. But Omar tells us many things which we cannot easily reconcile, for he is not the same Omar today that he was yesterday, and who knows in what vein we may find him to-morrow!

In one mood he bids us drink and rejoice, for soon shall we lie beneath the dust; and in another he warns us not to sell the countless ages of eternity for the sake of earth's momentary pleasures. Now he rises in anger against the ruthless Heaven that has thrust him, helpless and unwilling, into a life whose weary struggles are ended only by death; and now he turns lovingly to the eternal source of being and says that, knowing the secret of truth, he has no concern about a material heaven or hell. Sometimes agnostic, sometimes full of childlike faith; now rebellious, and again in a little while filled with the spirit of gentle thankfulness, he is in all his moods so human, so like ourselves, that his words find an echo in every heart. And though in distant Nishapur he has been so long asleep, his voice comes to us down the ages, still vibrating with the energy and magnetism of life, for his words are never distant, affected, or cold, but always the honest outpourings of a living, human soul.

That the Sufis employed such terms as wine, beauty, and kisses to express religious devotion, the perfection of the Divine Being, and the raptures of piety, is undoubted; but that they sometimes used them in a sense other than spiritual appears equally sure. In reading their poetry, therefore one must determine from the context whether the meaning is literal or spiritual, although it seems that the conclusions thus reached are often dependent upon the individual temperament of the reader rather than upon the exercise of an unbiased critical faculty. It would be well, however, to bear in mind that one of the greatest among them has told us how "they profess eager desire, but with no carnal affection, and circulate the cup, but no material goblet; since all things are spiritual in their sect, all is mystery within mystery."

The eight concluding quatrains, which are not properly a part of this translation, were suggested by Mr. FitzGerald's version, and have been retained only because they afford an easy method of indicating, by marginal references, some of the sources of his charming *Kuza Nama*.

Where Omar plays upon words, as for example where *jan*, the soul, *jam*, a cup, and *jama*, a garment, all occur in the same line, I have generally resorted to the clumsy expedient of a footnote. Also where the point of a verse depends upon the position of a single dot, as in quatrain 93, mere translation would be a totally inadequate method of conveying the meaning.

To this latter form of word-play the Arabic alphabet readily lends itself; hence, in Persian, by merely altering the position of a dot, the meaning of many words may be changed. So it happens that a trifling change of position will convert a neighbor (*jar*) into a thorn (*khar*) and cause crime (*jurm*) to become delightful (*khurram*), while the addition of a dot will convert the seas (*bihar*) into vapor (*bukhar*), or transform the solution of a problem (*hall*) into the sail of a ship (*jall*); if the position of the dot be changed, however, so that (*jall*) reads (*khall*), the ship's sail will be converted into vinegar. The footnotes treating of these and other matters were originally much more copious, but I thought it wise to reduce them when I recollected a story of an old Scotch lady who, after having praised in high terms the clearness of a certain work, added ingenuously that she "hoped, with a mickle mair study, to understand the explanatory notes of the editor."

Working far from the great libraries of the world, it has not been possible for me to verify all the right-hand marginal references. Most of them have been made upon the authority of Mr. Whinfield's edition of 1883 and have been verified as far as possible by comparison with other reproductions, while the remainder are the result of my own investigations.

I desire, also, to acknowledge the assistance I have received from the works of Mr FitzGerald, Mr Heron-Allen, Mr Nathan Haskell Dole, and others, and to express my thanks to those friends whose severe but kindly criticism has been warmly appreciated.

GEORGE ROE.
San Antonio, Texas,
September 1, 1906.

Section 1 - An Ode to Omar

1

KHAYYAM, old friend, although so long asleep
In distant Nishapur, where roses heap
Their petals o'er thy grave, how oft I hear
Thy living voice re-echo o'er the deep!

2

From Breslau's gates, Vienna's spacious halls,
Or where Turin uprears her hoary walls,
In deep Germanic chaunt, or dulcet lay,
The subtle singer of Khorasan calls.

3

Through Albion's isle and o'er the Western main,
In streams of lofty music, hark the strain
Of mystic numbers sung by thee of old,
And now, by other lips, oft sung again.

4

Not thine to scatter bricks along the sea,
Not thine such tasks of vain idolatry ;
Methinks, e'en now, I hear thy living tongue
Scathe shallow priest and canting Pharisee : —

5

"O poor blind teacher, who would lead the blind
In things beyond the ken of mortal mind,
Priest, mystic, scholar —or whate'er you be -
First seek the mystery, yourself, — and find.

6

"Or know you where the end of space may lie?
Or where limits of eternity?
Or what is space, or universe, or God?
Or why you live, or wherefore you must die?"

7

Alas, thy spirit, fearless of the rage
And thoughtless fury of a bigot age,
Like lesser spirits, long has passed away
To hidden scenes behind this mortal stage.

8

For still the same eternal law appears
That ruled creation through the bygone years,
That shaped the pathway of each speck of dust
And traced the courses of the heavenly spheres.

9

Thus pow'r and wisdom reach their lowly bed,
And shah, like peasant, joins the countless dead ;
Nor thinks of him who mounts the empty throne,
Nor heeds the feet that trample o'er his head.

10

And lo, the spot where mighty sultans sate,
Yon lofty pile where Jamshyd held his state,
Where nobles feasted and where beauty smiled,
Behold the crumbling Avail, the fallen gate!

11

Through yon dim corridor the vampire flits,
'Neath yon bleak tow'r the busy spider knits
Her crafty trap, the dismal night-owl hoots,
And o'er the wasting dome the vulture sits!

12

For death must visit, silent and alone,
The humble cot, the sultan's lofty throne;
And while we ponder what the riddle means,
The life we ponder is already gone.

13

And so Khayyam, old Friend, thou couldst not stay;
And ah, how often have I heard thee say -
'Not one returns to count the journey o'er;
The flow' r that dies is cut - passed away!"

14

I'll strive not, then, the mystery to sift —
Fast roll the years, the sands of life run swift -
But quaff the bowl, hail beauty with a kiss,
And leave the veil for coming death to lift.

15

And yet, perchance, — what mortal thing can say, -
That wondrous soul that lived within thy clay
And gave it pow'r to think and feel and love,
Hath vanquished death and triumphed o'er decay.

16

And as, at night, when darkness first descends,
When evening's veil o'er all the earth extends,
The vanished stars again bedeck the sky,
And shimm'ring light from Heaven's vault descends;

17

Or when, near dawn, behind the pearly gray
And rosy streaks that herald coming day,
The sun returns, in crimson glory clad,
So shall thy soul return, — perchance it may.

18

Perchance to Nature's fount fled back thy soul,
Where seas of love, in endless billows, roll ; —
Perchance within the Source of Life 'twas merged,
And lost again amidst the Mighty Whole.

19

A cup awaits us at the river' s brink,
Where souls are freed from Earth's enslaving link;
And when the radiant angel, kindly Death,
Invites our souls, we shall not fear to drink.

20

But swift as rain-drops to the ocean fall,
We soon shall join thee at the angel's call,
And thou and we shall all be merged in God,
The Source, the Stay, the final End of All.

Section 2 - The Awakening

1

Lo, dawn is rending night's dark veil in twain
Arise! Arise! and morning's goblet drain;
Drive grief away, for many a rosy morn
Will seek us here, and seek us long in vain.

2

And know ye why the herald of the day,
With clarion voice, peals forth his morning lay?
"Behold," he cries, "the mirror of the dawn;
A precious night again has slipped away!"

3

Now wakes Khurshyd on yonder flaming height,
And o'er the city flings a robe of light;
Kai-Khosru-like he fills the bowl of morn
With golden wine to pledge the parting night.

4

But ere the Sun arose in flashing pride,
Or Phantom death peeped through the mountain side,
"Come fill the cup ere Fate our cups shall fill!"
A lusty voice from out the tavern cried.

5

And better far, with Thee, in taverns learn,
Than in the temple from Thy visage turn.
Oh, First and Last of all creation Thou,
Whate'er Thou wilt, or cherish me or burn.

6

Elate I stand beside the fallen door,
My raiment pawned; heart, soul, and cup paid o'er;
And, flushed with wine, I know nor hope nor fear,
O'er fire and water, earth and air I soar,

7

But lo, without, the year is young and fair,
And yearning hearts to stilly meads repair:
The hand of Musa shines on ev'ry bough,
The breath of 'Isa rises on the air.

Section 3 - Spring song!

8

For now t'is Spring, when verdure clothes the land,
And flow'rs gleam white as Musa's snowy hand:
The breath of Isa wakes the sleeping earth,
And kindly rains refresh the thirsty sand.

9

The morning dews bedeck the tulip's face,
The violets bend their heads with timid grace,
And fairer still, the rosebud's petall'd veil
Shields blushing cheek from Zephyr's soft embrace.

10

Nor warm, nor cold, the day dawns bright and fair,
The rain-kissed flow'rs perfume the morning air:
And hark! in Pahlavi the bulbul trills -
"Come, drooping rose, this dewy vintage share."

11

Then sings the rose, "As Yusuf's flower I reign;
Come touch my lips and jewelled kisses gain."
"Oh, lovely flow'r, then where is Yusuf's sign?"
"Behold, my silken robe with blood-red stain."

12

O'er beauty's grave the gentle zephyr blows,
From beauty's cheek the blue-eyed violet grows;
And see, where royal crimson stained the sod,
The flaming tulip blossoms near the rose.

13

When Springtime wafts her perfumes o'er the lea,
By river's brink .with playmates fond and free,
I pledge my love in morning's joyful bowl.
And what is mosque or synagogue to me!

14

Some talk of Heav'n where streams like Kusar flow,
And houris dwell, and golden vineyards grow;
But fill my cup and give me beauty here,
Ah, give them now, and let the promise go.

15

A book of verses underneath the vine,
A loaf of bread, a jug of ruby wine,
And thou beside me, resting in the wild,
Would make the dreary wilderness divine!

16

See, morning dawns; the rosy cup retain,
And smash the crystal of repute again;
Thy lute is sweet, thy tresses soft as down, -
Ah, Heav'n is here, and future glory vain.

17

Sweet is the breeze that gently fans the rose;
Sweet, in the shade, to watch thy face repose :
Oh, tell me not that yesterday was sweet!
Today is sweet! Tomorrow - ah, who knows?

18

Whether at Balkh or Babylon, we die;•
Or sweet or bitter, soon the cup runs dry;
Come drink, my love, for many a silver moon
Will wax again and wane, where'er we lie.

19

And love's bright path is but the road to naught,
Where Fates rude talons have destruction wrought;
Oh lovely saki, water ere I die,
And this poor dust again to dust be brought!

Section 4 - Wisdom and Wine

20

I lay upon my couch in slumber deep,
And Wisdom cried aloud, "Oh, wherefore sleep?
For sleep is kin to death ; drink while you may;
Eternal slumber hastens o'er the steep!"

21

Ere yet the dawn of Azal shed its light
O'er dreary chaos and the realms of night,
The Pen, unmoved by good and evil, wrote:
Nor grief can change, nor endless toil rewrite.

22

And every sorrow, all our passing mirth,
Was long predestined, ere creation's birth;
But blame not Heav' n, for all is fore-ordained,
And Heav'n more helpless than the helpless earth.

23

All fearless, then, while mortal frame shall be,
Stand firm within the bounds of destiny;
Yield naught to foe, though Rustam, son of Zal,
Nor take from friend, though Hatim Tai were he.

24

For what is written, be it long or brief,
Remains the same, nor tears can give relief;
No drop of destiny is less nor more,
Though naught you know but life-long pain and grief.

25

I know not what the Lord hath made my share,
The joy of Heav'n - the Hell of deep despair;
But wine and beauty fill me with delight,
And Earth is here, and Paradise is - where?

26

The secret hidden from the mortal eye,
Nor living soul can read the mystery;
Save in the heart of earth, we have no rest :
So fill the bowl, 'twill soon be time to die.

27

How long shall I throw bricks upon the sea?
I scorn such tricks of vain idolatry!
Say not Khayyam is surely doomed to Hell,
Who knows of Hell, or Heav'n, or if they be?

28

And oh, how long engrossed in self remain ?
How long o'er futile problems strive in vain?
The path of life but leads thee to the grave;
So drink and dream, and dream and drink again.

29

And when thou hast some ruby wine, rejoice ;
Or canst in beauty's arms recline, rejoice;
Since all that is, must surely end in naught,
Think thou art naught while life is thine, rejoice.

30

No mind has solved the tangled mystery,
Nor passed the orbit of eternity;
The teacher and the tyro both are blind,
And grope amid the darkness helplessly.

31

But though you reach Aristo's lofty plane,
Or o'er imperial Rome, like Caesar, reign,
Drain Jamshyd's cup, your end must be the grave
Though Bahrain's self; dust turns to dust again.

32

'Tis dawn, oh friend of joyful foot, draw nigh:
Fill high the bowl, salute the rosy sky.
From Tyr to Dai the months remorseless roll
And drag to death e'en mighty Jam and Kai.

33

When flow'rs of joy with sparkling petals shine,
Why shun the crystal cup of ruby wine?
Time knows no mercy, drink, ere yet too late;
A day like this may ne'er again be thine.

34

And why lament what cannot come again?
Why think of morrow, when such thoughts are vain?
Seize fast to-day, ere all its joys go by
As summer breezes vanish o'er the plain.

35

Soon shall you bid farewell to mortal tie;
Soon shall you read life's deepest mystery.
Drink, for you know not when you go, nor where;
Drink, for you know not whence you came, nor why.

Section 5 - The futility of learning

36

When, like a hawk, to dizzy heights I soar
And fain would read and con the mysteries o'er,
No guide I find and back to Earth I fall,
And leave and enter by the self-same door.

37

And oft, when young, from teachers I designed
To fill with wisdom's lore my youthful mind:
But lo, the end of all their lofty themes : —
We came like water and depart like wind.

38

Unwilling, helpless, hurried through life's door,
And, helpless, whither, when the dream is o'er ?
Ah, better far to Earth I ne'er had come
Than come, live, go, - and taste of life no more!

39

Then oh, my soul, why on this dust bestow
The wretched boon of life, the pain, the woe
And all the passions that possess mankind,
To leave it dust again whene'er you go?

40

This spirit, freed from mortal bonds, could soar
Back through the realms of space to Heaven's door;
Its proper home lies o'er the azure sky,
And shame it was to touch this earthly shore.

41

When life first dawned high o'er this mortal cell,
Long sought my soul where Pen and Tablet dwell,
Sought Hell and Heav'n and heard the Master say -
Behold, within thyself, the heav'n and hell!"

42

Heav'n is the tranquil joy of inward rest,
And Hell, the anguish of a soul distress'd;
The azure sky is but the robe we wear,
And Jihun's flood, the tears of hearts oppress'd.

43

And Earth is but a caravanserai,
A resting place of fleeting night and day,
The remnant of a feast, where Jamshyd sate,
The tomb of many a Bahram passed away.

44

Thrust into life without my own consent,
Thrust back to death, with who knows what intent?
Arise, bright saki, fill the cup with wine
And drown the burden of my discontent.

45

And on that day when Heav'n is rent in twain.
And stars grow dim, and shining planets wane,
I'll seize the Master by the robe and cry: -
"Why cast us thus from life to death again?"

46

Ah, would this earth did yield a place of rest
To pilgrims by the long, long road oppress'd,
Whence, after many a year, we might return,
As trampled flow'rs return from Nature's breast.

47

Men call the Koran "Fount of Sacred Lore,"
"The Word Supreme," and, hasty, glance it o'er:
But on the goblet's rim a text is writ
That all shall read and ponder evermore.

48

And if your heart life's secret only knew,
Then, knowing death, t'would know God's secret too:
If, living, you know naught, what will you know
When death has come and you're no longer you?

Section 6 - The hammer of fate

49

But earth shall roll, as long it rolled before
Our names were lost, our footprints all grown o'er;
'T was long completed ere we touched its soil,
And when we're gone 'twill be no less nor more.

50

Khayyam, although this canopy of blue
Veils all the myst'ries from your mortal view,
Know this, th' eternal saki oft hath seen
In life's deep cup a myriad things like you.

51

Naught speaks the ball, but right or left it goes,
As Fate's relentless mallet strikes the blows;
But He who toss'd thee to the game's mad rush |
He knows the reason, aye, He knows, He knows - !

52

And Thou whom all creation fain would find,
The waters speak Thy name, the whisp'ring wind:
But all are deaf; Thy face is ever near,
But none, alas, can see, for all are blind!

53

Like helpless chessmen on the checkered blocks,
We're hither, thither moved, till Heaven knocks
The luckless pieces from the crowded board,
And one by one returns them to the box.

54

And oh, what hearts the cruel Wheel hath crushed!
How many a flower the hand of steel hath crushed!
Nor youth, my son, nor beauty can avail -
Full many a bud the ruthless heel hath crushed.

55

And now the page of life is sear and rent,
The blossoms fade and fall, the spring is spent;
Ah, lovely bird of youth, so quickly gone,
I marked not when you came, nor when you went.

Section 7 - Drowning one's sorrows

56

So fill the bowl, swift passes life's brief day,
And oh! th' eternal bed of chilly clay!
No friend, no song, no wine, no love, -
The flow'r that dies is ever passed away.

57

Yea, grasp the cup, for all we love and own,
O'er which the tendrils of our hearts have grown,
Melt swift as morning dew beneath the sun,
Shine one brief hour, and then, alas, are gone!

58

And though the cup be lull and sweet, what then?
The last brief day of life must come, what then?
Although you've lived an hundred years of joy,
Or have an hundred years to live, what then?

59

And think, from all the myriads gone before,
Not one returns to 'count the journey o'er;
So yield up naught for hope of promised bliss;
Departed once, thou shalt return no more.

60

In yonder mansion of the mighty dead,
Where Bahram feasted, prowling lions tread,
And where his cunning lasso caught the gur,
Behold, the gur has closed o'er Bahram' s head.

61

And yonder palace tow'ring to the blue,
Where kings, in homage, to the portals drew,
I heard the lonely ring-dove moaning there,
And sobbing soft her plaintive "Coo coo coo!"

62

And once, at Tus, from off an aged bough,
Methought a raven lit upon the brow
Of Khosru's Skull, and thus it spake: "O king,
What clarion hails thy royal glory now?"

63

Wide yawns the tomb where you and I, sweet friend,
Shall each, in turn, to lifeless dust descend !
Oh draught of death that steeps the very soul
In dreamless sleep, unconscious to the end!

64

Khayyam, why drown thyself in sorrow here ?
What though thy sins like ocean sands appear?
Mercy can reach thee, though it pass the pure;
'Tis made for sinners, wherefore dost thou fear?

65

Go toss commandment to the passing wind,
Nor with tradition keep thy soul confined;
Pay hate with love, enjoy the ruddy wine,
Nor fear the grave, nor what there is behind.

66

Ere Fate lay low thy head, the goblet drain,
Bring forth the rosy cup and staunch thy pain; -
Oh, heedless fool, art thou a golden store
That men will bury and dig up again?

67

Drink, if thou wilt, or fail to watch and pray,
Or break the fasts, or plunder by the way:
Hear now the Word of Truth from old Khayyam, -
No loving heart can wander far astray.

68

And when the rose shall bloom o'er Nature's shrine,
And friends invite, and buoyant youth is thine,
Lift high the bowl - eternal life is there -
And drown thy sorrows in the joy of wine.

Section 8 - The implacable deity

69

When Allah sets the steeds of Heaven free,
Loosed bright Parwin and shining Mushtari,
My life, my lot, by Kismat was ordained;
And all my sins are part of Destiny.

70

Who fashioned me of moistened clay ? Not I!
Who spun my silk and wool array? Not I!
And who the good and ill of all my life
Upon my forehead wrote? Not I ! Not I ! !

71

Then mark my scanty virtues one by one,
And, ten by ten, forgive the wrongs I've done;
Nor fan the flame and, by the Prophet's tomb,
The fire will die and anger's heat be gone.

72

My nature oft o'ercomes my might, - alas!
My deeds bring woe, however I fight, - alas!
And though I trust God's pardon shall be mine,
The shame will never leave my sight, - alas!

73

But thou who settest in the way a snare,
With threats of hell for all who stumble there,
Almighty spirit, whom the spheres obey,
Is mine the sin, or Thine the greater share?

74

Whate'er my life, it dawned at thy command,
Whate'er my nature, 'tis what Thou hast plann'd;
Nor worse, nor better, than it came from Thee -
A helpless thing, the creature of Thy hand.

75

The caravan of life moves strangely on,
It wanes and fades, then waxes clear anon;
Why fret, bright saki, o'er tomorrow's doom?
Come, fill the goblet, ere the night be gone!

76

But oh, that God would make this world anew,
Before mine eyes rebuild it, fair and true,
Or from the roll of life blot out my name,
Or take from life my wrongs and burdens too.

77

If I were God, how swift mine anger dire
Would sweep away this universe entire
And build a better, where the soul, set free,
Might sometimes reach its inmost heart's desire.

78

A voice that haunts the path of pleasure calls,
And ev'ry hour the awful warning falls -
"Know now, forever, when you die, YOU DIE,
And Spring's soft voice no human soul recalls!"

79

Then oh, what profit to the sphere my birth?
Or, when I die, what will my death be worth?
Or who beneath the vault of Heav'n can tell
Or why we come, or why we leave the earth?

80

And though they be the noble and the wise,
Though prophets come and lofty seers arise,
E'en these emerge not from the sable night,
But tell their dreams and then reclose their eyes.

81

And those who led the mighty hosts of thought,
And scaled the heav'ns and many a myst'ry sought,
Became amazed whene'er they thought of Thee,
Their minds were dizzied and their wisdom naught.

82

And we who love to drain the flagon deep,
And ye who pray and nightly vigils keep,
We neither know, we both are cast adrift;
But One, He knows; the rest are fast asleep.

83

Take counsel, then, and give thine ear to me,
For Allah's sake cast off hypocrisy;
The future is forever, earth but now;
For one brief hour sell not eternity.

84

"Oh, learned Fools," the voice of wisdom saith,
"Why spend the hours in talk of life and death?
'Tis dried up fruit, go taste the vine instead;
On what can ne'er know, why waste your breath?"

Section 9 - The Potter

85

When in the market-place one day I stopped
To watch a potter pounding his fresh clay,
The clay addressed him in mystic tongue -
"Once I was a man, so treat me gently, pray!"

86

Then thought I how that handle once embraced
With yearning touch some peri-slender waist;
And how, perchance, those sad complaining lips
In rapture, once, on other lips were placed.

87

But on the potter sped, nor seemed to feel
The touching pathos of his clay's appeal,
Nor thought how some poor, helpless human frame
Lay prone before him on the busy wheel.

88

Oh, thoughtless man, this mortal clay is naught; -
The azure vault of Heav'n itself is naught; -
Then take what joy you may, your very life
Is hut a passing breath — and that is naught!

89

No mortal eye can find the hidden key,
Nor read the secret of eternity;
Of Thee and me, behind the veil, they speak,
But when 'tis rent, no more of Thee and me.

Section 10 - The illusion of death

90

For oh, bright saki, they who passed before,
To dust have dropped beyond the mystic door;
Their lofty themes have turned to empty wind.
And now their lips lie locked for evermore.

91

That ancient puzzle of the spheres, ah me,
What endless toil to read the mystery!
'Tis but a phantom from the boundless deep,
Blown back again o'er death's mysterious sea.

92

But life shall rise from death on soaring wing,
And all our fears from baseless visions spring:
Since Isa's breath revived my wearied soul,
Where art thou, death? Oh grave, where is thy sting!

93

Sad, severed from the sea, a rain-drop sighed;
And, smiling gently, thus the sea replied: -
"Oh, naught divides us, for in God we dwell,
But one in all, for all in One abide."

94

Oh Thou my strength, my very being's whole,
Heart of my heart, and soul within my soul,
From Thee alone I come, and Thou art mine,
My source, my life, my parting spirit's goal.

95

And though in synagogue, mosque, school, or cell,
Men, seeking Heav'n and fearing Sheol, dwell:
Yet he who knows the secret truth of God
Sow no such chaff and scorns the fear of Hell.

96

Deep from the circle of the hidden sphere,
To each, in turn, the cup of death draws near;
Then do not sigh, hut when it comes to thee,
Take thou the cup and drink it without fear.

97

And ye who ponder over creed and prayer,
And ye who, dazed by doubt, well-nigh despair,
Oh, hear the voice that, sudden, cries aloud -
"Fools, the right path is neither there, nor there!"

98

'Tis but a breath betwixt the false and true,
'Twixt faith and doubt, and soul and body too;
Oh, *carpe diem!* all that life can give
Is one short breath, and then - ah, would we knew!

99

Embarrassed offspring of the primal four,
And sev'nfold Heav'n - the myst'ry whelms thee o'er:
Drink deep, my friend, I've told thee many a time,
Departed once, thou shalt return no more.

100

The wine's a ruby and the cup a mine;
The cup is body, and the soul is wine:
But ah, the crystal cup contains a tear, -
A bleeding heart is hidden in the vine.

101

And lo, this vintage running through the veins
Of all creation, o'er creation reigns;
In plants and creatures many a form sustains,
And though they die, the essence still remains.

102

And when the clouds arise, with Imber's plume,
And rains, caressing, coax the earth to bloom,
Oh, think what blossoms from our dust shall spring,
And throw their fragrance on the breeze, - for whom?

103

And those soft robes yon shaded streamlets wear,
Perchance may spring from some celestial fair;
Ah, scorn them not, nor, careless, tread them o'er ;
Who knows what beauty's head lies resting there?

104

Nay, crush them not, for long ere we were born,
Day changed to night and night again to morn;
This dust, perchance, was once a beaming eye,
Or lovely mole, by bright-eyed beauty worn.

Section 11 - A walk in the Garden

105

Come, friend, an hour of pleasure ere we go,
For Life's sweet breath will soon be sinking low:
To-morrow's dawn may find both you and me
With those who went sev'n thousand years ago.

106

And yonder skies too often tear away
Our dearest friends, and all our hopes betray;
So, Darling, live - live now, while life is ours;
To-morrow's naught, and naught is yesterday.

107

And see, this cup hath rose-red wine, - may be;
This crystal cup s a ruby mine, - may be;
This water sparkles with a melted gem;
Through moonlight's veil the sunbeams shine, - may be.

108

Who brought thee here this eve at twilight, - who?
From harem's gloom to sparkling moonlight, - who?
Who raised thy veil to fan the love that burns
When thou art absent ; who, my lovelight, - who?

109

Thou precious jewel of this yearning heart,
Choice of my spirit, of my soul a part, -
What is so dear to me as life, but thou ?
And sweeter far than life itself thou art.

110

Drink 'neath the moonbeams, greet me with a song;
Tonight we live, sweet moon, and love is strong;
To-morrow, when we lie beneath the sod,
The moon shall seek us, and shall seek us long.

111

She tears night's robe and lo, the gloom has fled;
So drink, my love, for when our souls have sped,
This selfsame moon will rise the same, and set,.
Nor shadow mark the mighty world o'erhead.

112

Those countless orbs that roll o'er Heaven's main,
Perplex the learn'd, their myst'ries still remain;
Oh, seek not whence they come, or whither bound,
The wise grow dizzy 'neath their mighty train.

113

And Thou, who hidest now behind the blue,
In all existence art Thou seen anew;
Thy wondrous deeds to please Thyself are done;
Thou art the actor and spectator too.

114

'Tis but a moment, and the myst'ry's gone, -
A breath, a whisper, and the secret's done;
This mighty universe and all therein -
Earth, sky, - man, angel, God, - All, All are One.

Section 12 - The Colloquy of the Pots

115

One eve, when Ramazan was nearly o'er,
I chanced, again, within the potter's door,
Where earthen pots of many a shape and size
Upon the table lay, and on the floor.

116

And some were wrapped in silence, others not;
And one spake loudly, 'mid a wrangling lot -
"Why talk ye thus and thus, ye know not what?
Who is the potter, pray, and who the pot?"

117

"Well," said another, "you have naught to say;
If still the potter live, he's far away;
We are the pots, but then, what do we here?
The buyer and the seller, where are they?"

118

Then spake a vessel of less comely make -
"They say that when the potter comes he'll break
All shapes ungainly. Are the pots to blame
Because the hand that made them chanced to shake?"

119

"Thy handles cracked, my spout is all awry,
Nor can we change them, howsoe'er we try ;
For his mistake, shall we be thrown aside,
Lest our ill shape offend his perfect eye?"

120

"Are we to blame, and so be cast to Hell?
Can this be true, as some wise pipkins tell ?
"No, no," cried out a little pious pot,.
"He'll have mercy, and 'twill all be well!"

121

And while they talked, the time sped quickly on,
Till new-moon came and Ramazan was gone:
And stealing softly through the open door,
A dusky porter seized them, one by one.

122

And down the ages has the story rolled,
Of red-clay fashioned into human mold,
And filled by Allah with the breath of life,
Till Death steals through the door, and ALL IS TOLD!
